DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 455 352 UD 034 342

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TITLE Mentoring African American Middle School Students: Applying Principles of Antiracism Education to the Problem of Closing the Black-White Achievement Gap.
PUB DATE 2001-07-00
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Annual National Conference of the National Association of African American Studies and the National Association of Hispanic and Latino Studies (Houston, TX, February 21-26, 2000).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Black Students; Consciousness Raising; Faculty Development; *Mentors; *Middle School Students; Middle School Teachers; Middle Schools; Racial Differences; *Racial Identification; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Antiracist Education; *White Teachers

ABSTRACT

Part of a larger ongoing study of the impact of antiracism mentoring on black student achievement, this report of a developmental study used a before-after approach to evaluate the pattern, direction, and significance of change in participating white teachers' white racial identity as a function of antiracism professional development. Using the Helms and Carter (1994) White Racial Identity Attitude Survey to verify the status of prospective white mentors' racial identities prior to their service as the antiracism mentors of black middle school students, this study's effect sizes data indicate that the participant group advanced in three of five areas of white racial identity. Adopting the conventional standard for practically significant effect sizes, the analysis of the difference between pretest and posttest subscale means indicates that participants advanced on the disintegration, pseudo-independence, and autonomy subscales. The study concludes that the antiracism professional development effectively advanced the prospective antiracism mentors' white identity status. Discussion focuses on the theoretical and practical implications of the results for the larger ongoing study of antiracism mentoring as a means to close the black-white achievement gap. (Contains 16 references.) (Author/SM)

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ED 455 352

MENTORING AFRICAN AMERICAN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS: APPLYING PRINCIPLES OF ANTIRACISM EDUCATION TO THE PROBLEM OF CLOSING THE BLACK-WHITE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

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Mentoring African American Middle School Students: Applying Principles of Antiracism Education to the Problem of Closing the Black-White Achievement Gap

Abstract

Part of a larger ongoing study of the impact of antiracism mentoring on Black student achievement, this developmental study used a before-after approach to evaluate the pattern, direction, and significance of change in participating White teachers' (N = 50) White racial identity as a function of antiracism professional development. Using the Helms and Carter (1994) White Racial Identity Attitude Survey to verify the status of prospective White mentors' racial identities prior to their service as the antiracism mentors of Black middle school students, this study's effect size data indicate that the participant group advanced in three of five areas of White racial identity. Adopting the conventional standard (+/- .33) for practically significant effect sizes (Isaac & Michael, 1995), the analysis of the difference between pretest and posttest sub-scale means indicates that participants advanced on the "Disintegration" (d = - .35); "Pseudo Independence" (d = .48,); and "Autonomy" (d = .57) sub-scales. The study concludes that the antiracism professional development effectively advanced the prospective antiracism mentors' White racial identity status. Discussion focuses on the theoretical and practical implications of the results for the larger ongoing study of antiracism mentoring as a means to close the Black-White achievement gap.

Deeply imbedded in American society, coloring virtually all cross-cultural interactions, racism negatively affects the quality of teacher-student relationships. Indeed, within school contexts, perhaps one of racism's most observable and enduring expressions is the Black-White achievement gap. Because school achievement perforce depends on the quality of teacher-student relationships, the neglect of poor quality interactions between White educators and Black students only insures that the Black-White achievement gap will persist. Unless White educators are willing to take the first step toward improving their relationships with racially different students in general and their Black students in particular, racism will continue to afflict teacher-student relationships, unduly hampering the efforts to improve academic achievement among all students.

Racism describes a system of advantage that ensues on the basis of race (e.g., see Wellman, 1993). Guided by this definition, accepting its reality as an obstacle for individuals psychosocial growth, the principles of Antiracism Education aim to help teachers in general and White teachers in particular to critique the dominant discourse of racism (i.e.,

the existing status quo), understand their participation and investment in maintaining it, and thereby transform their own internalized racism. After transformation, in relating to their other race students, White teachers are prepared to adopt the posture of antiracist educators. This posture, a set of attitudes, expectations, and behaviors that challenge racism, places the White teacher and other-race student on the same footing; that is, they become allies in the struggle against racism as opposed to adversaries in the struggle to maintain it.

Precepts, Principles, and Practices of Antiracism Education

Although their efforts have not been sufficiently effective, schools have not exactly ignored the problem of racism. As a way to combat the negative effects of racism and improve interracial relations, schools have embraced Multicultural Education, the curricula that expose students to a socially diverse variety of heroes, historical events, and holidays. However, unlike Multicultural Education, Antiracism Education invites educators to undergo the rigors of psychosocial transformation that is to commit to changing

their racial identities (e.g., see Helms, 1986). Moreover, in contrast to deficit models that offer genetic or socioeconomic explanations for the Black-White achievement gap, the Antiracism Education model assumes that the responsibility for changing achievement is not that of the less powerful child's but that of the more powerful adult professional who either consciously or unconsciously acts within an institutional milieu that some describe as inherently racist (e.g., see Scheurich & Young, 1997) ostensibly to maintain the status quo. Antiracist Education principles work to provide both a basis for teachers to develop a common language around the problem and experience of racism and a means for the creation of instructional practices that promise to ameliorate its negative impact on school children.

Although some might consider Antiracism Education a new approach, such is not the case; it has a long and distinguished history: Antiracism Education has its roots in abolitionism. As early as the 1780s, America's Abolition Societies organized antiracism curricula to address the issues of slavery (e.g., see Higginbotham, 1987; Johnson & Smith et al., 1998). Just as slavery and racism are inseparable, so

too are abolitionism and antiracism. History shows that the Abolition Movement, a Black-White alliance against racism, helped to topple the institution of slavery (see Higginbotham, 1987; Johnson & Smith et al., 1998). Building on the power that is inherent in such Black-White alliances, Antiracist Education picks up the struggle against racism where the Abolition Movement left off; it provides a concrete means to end the race-based disparity in school achievement.

Carter and Goodwin (1994) argue that "when race is subsumed, the current and historical role that it has played and continues to play in the educational sense is distorted and clouded" (p. 292). Bowser, Hunt and Pohl (1981) maintain that racism in America is a White problem because the racist attitudes, behavior and social structures of the dominant European American culture directly and indirectly undermine Whites' capacity to grow and develop. To move beyond racism, White people must take a look at how they, as a race, have participated in constructing and maintaining hierarchical racial identity structures, discordant models of White racial identity. Recognizing the problem, the research on racism has developed several alternative models of White racial identity

(e.g., see Helms, 1984; Jones, 1972; Kovel, 1970; Terry, 1977).

An alternative model of White racial identity. Helms (1986) framed the problem of improving interracial relations at school in terms of White racial identity development. Building on her observations of teachers, Helms developed a five-stage model of White racial identity development (WRID).

The first "Contact" stage of the WRID model describes White teachers who are unaware of their racial identity, their privilege status as a White person, and tend to base their racial attitudes and behavior on stereotypes rather than experience. Helms discovered that Contact stage teachers manifest inconsistencies in their educational philosophies, professing, for example, "I see children as all the same," while holding stereotypes that cast the racially different child in a negative light.

The second stage of WRID describes "Disintegration." As he or she becomes increasingly aware of the history and impact of racism, the life of the White teacher

begins to "come apart," and, as awareness grows, he or she often expresses an honest desire to "do the right thing."

The third stage, "reintegration," describes a period of dissonance; the teachers' colleagues begin to notice differences in his or her behavior and subject him or her to tremendous peer pressure to "not rock the boat" (i.e., to maintain the status quo). Helms notes that such pressure can stop some teachers' progression through the stages of WRID. Thus, during reintegration, the person either makes a commitment to continue learning and thereby enter the next higher stage or quit learning or remains in the reintegration stage.

The White person's conscious decision to continue learning in the face of peer pressure initiates the fourth "Pseudo Independent" stage of WRID. At this stage, the teacher assumes personal responsibility for dismantling personal and professional racism. The pseudo independent White teachers may begin to distance themselves from other White teachers who are not on the same antiracist journey.

The fifth stage, "Autonomy" reflects the situation wherein White teachers are able to learn about racism from

other White people; that is, they recognize that they no longer need require the presence of Black people to discuss the issues of racism. It is also at this level where Whites begin to actively seek other White allies, those who are committed to disrupting the cycle of oppression and racism. The Autonomy stage describes the person's growing awareness of personal responsibility for racism, consistent acknowledgement of ones whiteness, and abandonment of racism in any of its forms [is] the defining aspect of ones personality" (Helms, 1990, p.66).

Antiracism Mentoring Framework

Our larger ongoing research of conditions under which White teacher mentoring can raise Black student achievement employs a conceptual framework that construes the components of an antiracism mentoring program. Figure 2 describes the framework that guides the larger study. The framework illustrates the path by which teachers prepare for and serve in their role as mentors of Black middle school students. The framework identifies the event of antiracism professional development and shows its connection to three

types of possible mentor orientations: Positive, Conflicted, and Negative. We determined that systematic empirical research could quantify the frameworks hypothesized connection. Building on Helms (1990), we designed a study to objectify the connection between the antiracism professional development and the prospective antiracism mentors orientations.

Purposes of the Study

The general purpose of the present study is to determine the extent to which the curriculum of antiracism professional development actually and positively changes the status of White teachers' racial identity in preparation for their service as mentors of Black middle school students. To meet this purpose, we designed the present study as a developmental study; specifically, it seeks to specify the pattern, direction, and significance of change in White teachers' racial identities as a function of their participation in antiracism professional development. The present study represents a necessary step in the overall research program

that tries to determine the impact of antiracism mentoring on the achievement of Black middle school students.

Hypothesis and rationale. The present study test the hypothesis that White teachers who undergo antiracism professional development will manifest positive changes in their identities as White persons. If the precepts, principles, and practices of Antiracism Education are effectively translated into the antiracism professional development's curriculum, and White teachers who undergo it internalize (i.e., learn) its content, then they must necessarily manifest positive changes in their emerging racial identities.

Given an accurate measure of White racial identity, the study that assesses the status of the White teachers' racial identities both before and after they undergo the antiracism professional development should produce data that capture the advances in teachers' racial identities. Producing such confirmatory evidence, the present study will accept its hypothesis as one that is plausible. If, however, failing to produce confirmatory evidence, the research discovers disconfirmatory evidence, we will reject the hypothesis as

one that is untenable and modify it in accordance with the data.

Method

Research Design

The paradigm that guides this developmental study is the professional development situation wherein White middle school teachers who vary in the stage of their White racial identities undergo antiracism training. Some are at relatively lower stages, some at middle stages, and some are at relatively higher stages and all are undergoing antiracism training. To capture and manage this variability, the present study adopted the "One-Group Pretest-Posttest" design (see Isaac & Michael, 1995). The unit of observation is the group of teacher-participants in the antiracism professional; under this before-after design, we generated one observational unit for analysis.

Setting and Participants

Ten years ago, to address the achievement gap between Black and White students, ten suburban Boston school districts collaboratively developed the Eastern

Massachusetts Initiative (EMI). EMI staff developed a graduate level course for educators' antiracism professional development. To help educators apply antiracism principles to the problem of improving their relationships with culturally different students, the antiracism professional development curriculum includes pertinent readings, videotapes of ideal White teacher-Black student interactions, interactive activities, large and small group discussions, short writing assignments, and the development of case studies. Although the EMI schools do not require educators to undergo antiracism professional development, nevertheless, to date, EMI has trained over 700 of the member schools' educators. Helms' WRID model offers the research on the Black-White student achievement gap a means to evaluate the extent to which the intervention of antiracism professional development improves White middle school teachers' capacity to mentor Black students, improve African American student achievement, and thereby close the local Black-White achievement gap. The study's participants (N = 50) were 12 White male and 38 female educators who hailed from an EMI member school district and varied on

two other social and professional indices. Their ages ranged from a high of 60 years to a low of 30 years with a median age of 47 years. They also varied in professional position; six were administrators and forty-four were teachers.

Criterion Measure and Operations

White racial identity served as the criterion measure for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the antiracism professional development. By White racial identity, we describe the individual's enduring sense of belonging to and sharing the history, aims, and culture of the White race. As White racial identity constitutes a psychological construct and thus is not directly observable, the study operationalized it in terms of scores on Helms and Carter's (1994) White Racial Identity Attitude Survey (WRIAS) instrument.

Antiracism professional development served as the principal independent factor. As, within the constraints of its one-group, pretest-posttest design, the study exposed all participants to the independent factor, we did not consider it as a variable but rather as a constant.

Instrumentation

The WRIAS instrument assesses variability in White racial attitudes along a five-point Likert-type scale that denotes the extent of agreement with 50 content-relevant statements. The scale encompasses (1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) uncertain, (4) agree, and (5) strongly disagree categories. Reliability and validity evidence. On the basis of studies of WRIAS reliability and validity, Helms and Carter (1990) concluded that the reliabilities for each of the five scales, which range from .65 to .76, exceed the median reliability coefficient of .54 that serves as a standard of minimum reliability for personality test (Anastasi, 1982: in Helms & Carter, 1990). Summarizing their validity research, Helms and Carter (1990) concluded that the content, construct, and criterion validity data are sufficiently strong to warrant the use of WRIAS scales in further research. Still, as a way to insure the instruments' performance, they caution that researchers should calculate the reliability estimates for their samples.

As our research is interested in the gains of a group between the pre-testing and post-testing occasions, our work

to confirm the reliability of WRIAS scores for our sample involved the reliability of difference approach (Crocker & Algina, 1986, pp. 148-150). The reliability of difference approach yielded a moderately low reliability estimate ($r = .318$). Thus we conclude that the scores are only less than moderately consistent over time. This finding did not surprise us: the participants were a relatively homogeneous group; they were all White professional educators who were teaching in suburban schools; moreover, they all volunteered to participate in the study. Given these circumstances, we expect that the value of the reliability statistic will increase as our sample expands to include a more heterogeneous group of participants.

Data Collection Procedures

During the Fall 1999 semester, one hundred educators enrolled in the antiracism professional development course. EMI functionaries randomly placed them into four instructional sections of 25 each. EMI functionaries also randomly assigned two instructors to each section; one of the present researchers co-taught one of the sections. Except for the first and last sessions wherein the

larger 100-member group met for eight hours per session, the14-week antiracism education course met once weekly for three hours. Each section used the same curriculum, course objectives, homework assignments, books, videos, and supplementary materials. Serving as one of the instructors, one of us asked the larger group of 100 enrollees for their participation in the study. Fifty of the 100 enrollees volunteered to participate. As one of us co-taught a section that contained some of the study's participants, on both the pretest and posttest occasions, we employed a researcher proxy to administer the WRIAS. During the first eight-hour session, the participants anonymously completed the 50-item WRIAS in about one half of an hour; and, during the last eight-hour session, as a closing exercise, the participants again anonymously completed the same WRIAS survey. Using SPSS© 6.1 for the Power Macintosh (SPSS, Inc., 1994), we organized and analyzed the data.

Findings

According to Helms and Carter (1990), individuals' racial attitudes are fluid; as such, respondents can move forward and backward through the five stages, or even

remain at a particular stage regardless of the intervention. As this relates to scoring, the higher the respondents score, the more descriptive of the respondent is the sub-scale. Thus, for example, a score of five at the Contact level suggest that the respondent more likely reflects the content of the Contact sub-scale; whereas, a score of one indicates that the respondent least likely reflects that content. Table 1 lists the means and standard deviations of the participant group's WRIAS scores.

Contact. The pretest score on Contact (M = 3.0780) indicates that, as a group, participants were somewhat uncertain about their racial identities. Being somewhat uncertain, individuals with this contact-stage score typically see the world from a "color-blind" or cultureless perspective and are generally naive regarding how race and racism impacts on herself or himself as well as other people. The slightly higher posttest mean (M = 3.1400) evinces only a small shift toward the undesirable direction of increased uncertainty.

Disintegration. The participant group's somewhat low pretest scores for Disintegration (M = 2.0640) indicates

that, on a personal level, they were more than moderately aware of the social implications of race. The scores suggest that, as a group, the participants want to assume some responsibility for discrimination by acknowledging his or her White racial identity; but, at the same time, they feel somewhat trapped in the opposition the White and Black cultures. Their scores show only some trace of feeling that they must choose one or the other but not both worlds. The group's relatively lower posttest Disintegration scores (M = 1.90) indicates that participants experienced some reduction in the conflict of having to choose between the two worlds and are moving toward the next stage.

Reintegration. The group's relatively low pretest scores for Reintegration (M = 1.79) indicates that participants were showing only a weak tendency to idealize everything White and denigrate everything Black. At the time pre-testing,, the participant's covert or overt expressions of anger and tendency to project their negative feelings onto Blacks was not strong. The group's relatively lower posttest scores (M = 1.69) indicate that they are advancing toward the next higher Pseudo Independence stage.

Pseudo-Independence. The moderate group pretest mean for Pseudo Independence (M = 3.52) appear to reflects the participants' moderate internalization of Whiteness and capacity to take personal responsibility to ameliorate the consequences of racism. Within this higher stage of White racial identity, participants show a moderate intellectual understanding of Black culture and recognition of the unfair benefits and unearned privileges of being White in American society. The moderately high mean posttest score (M = 3.73) indicates movement in a positive direction. After the antiracism professional development, participants appear poised to enter the next higher stage.

Autonomy. The group's pretest scores for Autonomy (M = 3.66) indicate that, as a group, the participants have a moderately strong racially transcendent worldview; the participants show an internalized positive non-racist White identity. They value cultural similarities and differences; feel a kinship with people regardless of race; and actively seek to acknowledge and abolish racial oppression. The moderately high posttest mean (M = 3.86) shows increases in the strength

of the participants' capacity for positive relations with racially different Black students.

Summary of the Findings

Figure 1 summarizes the pattern, direction, and significance of change in White racial identity as a function of White teachers' participation in the antiracism professional development. It shows a general pattern of movement from the lower Contact stage to the higher Pseudo Independence stage and the highest Autonomy stage. We evaluate this movement as advancement, a positive direction, because the two higher stages contain the characteristics of individuals who are able to conduct genuinely antiracism mentoring relationships with Black students. As most researchers consider that effect sizes equal to or greater than +/- .33 as practically significant, that is of sufficient magnitude to make a difference at the concrete level of practice (Isaac & Michael, 1995), we relied on this convention to evaluate the significance of change. The effect size data in Figure 1 show a significant but negative change in Disintegration (d = -.35). Despite the negative value of the effect size, we evaluate this change as positive because it represents a substantial

reduction in the conflict that characterizes individuals at this stage, and a reduction in conflict is a prerequisite to moving forward to the higher stages of White racial identity (Helms, 1990). The effect size data further show that the participants underwent significant positive changes in the Pseudo Independence and Autonomy stages. Given this, we conclude that the antiracism professional development had the positive effect of significantly advancing participants' White racial identities.

Discussion

To produce data that capture the advances in teachers' racial identities, this study assessed the status of the teachers' identities both before and after they underwent the antiracism professional development. We assumed that if the precepts, principles, and practices of Antiracism Education are effectively translated into the antiracism professional development's curriculum, and White teachers who undergo it internalize (i.e., learn) its content, then they must necessarily manifest positive changes in their emerging racial identities. We used the WRIAS (Helms & Carter, 1994) to

capture variability in participants' emerging White racial identities and computed effect sizes to capture the pattern, direction, and significance of hypothesized positive change.

Hypothesis Evaluation

We hypothesized that teachers who undergo antiracism professional development will manifest positive changes in his or her identity as a White person. The effect size findings show that participants underwent significant change in the hypothesized direction. These data represent confirmatory evidence; as such, we accept our hypothesis as plausible. Thus we conclude that the antiracism professional development effectively advances White teachers' identity as a White person.

Implications for the Larger Ongoing Research on Antiracism Mentoring

The theoretical implications of this study pertain to the framework that guides the larger ongoing study of the impact antiracism mentoring on Black student achievement. Figure 2 illustrates the interrelation of components of the antiracism mentoring program and shows how these components relate to Black student achievement. Our study

suggests that we can use the WRIAS systematically to classify the antiracism mentors' orientations prior to their service as mentors of Black students.

As Figure 2 indicates, the framework accommodates three types of antiracism mentor orientations: Positive, Conflicted, and Negative. In the future next step of this research program, we will classify participants who score are at the two upper stages of WRIAS as having the "Positive" orientation; those at the two middle stages as having the "Conflicted" orientation; and those who score at the lowest WRIAS category as "Negative."

At the practical level the implications are to improving the curriculum for antiracism professional development. Using the criterion of positive change to evaluate the specific aspects of the EMI antiracism curriculum, future research can find ways to more teachers advance to the higher stages of White racial identity. Doing so would provide enormous benefits not only to the teacher-participants but also to the mentoring program.

Limitations of the Study

Even as we accept the plausibility of our research hypothesis, we do so cautiously as this study is not without limitations. By virtue of the study's design, we are not assured that the changes in identity are strictly due to participation in the antiracism professional development; questions about the study's internal validity remain. Although the study's before-after design addresses preexisting differences and controls for selection and mortality, it does little to address three rival hypotheses that could provide an equal and alternative explanation for the results: history, effects of testing, and statistical regression (Isaac & Michael, 1995). Our future study must adopt a design that controls for these effects. In addition to our concerns about the threats to internal validity and the issue of moderately low reliability of difference scores, our study's sampling strategy limits its external validity. We cannot not substantiate the extent to which this study's results apply to other educational settings. Readers should be careful when apply these results to other settings.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Participant Group's Pretest and Posttest WRIAS Scores

	WRIAS Category				
Condition	C	D	R	P	A
Pretest Mean	3.08	2.06	1.79	3.53	3.66
(SD)	(.53)	(.45)	(.43)	(.42)	(.35)
Posttest Mean	3.14	1.90	1.69	3.73	3.86
(SD)	(.51)	(.37)	(.64)	(.40)	(.67)

[a] For all cells, N = 50

Codes: C = Contact; D = Disintegration; R = Reintegration; P = Pseudo Independence; A = Autonomy Figure Caption